



# NHTSA

NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

## ODI National Recall Creative Concept Testing

8.23.2022



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# RESEARCH DESIGN



# Research Design

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## PURPOSE

Evaluate how effective three proposed banner ad creative concepts are at getting U.S. vehicle owners to use NHTSA's online VIN lookup tool (or the SafeCar mobile app).

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate concepts for online banner ads
2. Identify most compelling elements of concept
3. Diagnose potential areas of improvement
4. Measure the likelihood to influence behavior

## METHODOLOGY

### Online Focus Groups

- Eight focus groups (75-mins)
- n=46 participants (28 females, 18 males)

### Qualification Criteria

- National audience
- Licensed driver
- Owns and operates a vehicle at least weekly
- Primary or shared decision maker in vehicle maintenance

# Discussion Flow

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**Warm-up/Initial Discussion**

**Evaluation of Individual Concepts**

**Assign  
Grade**

**Main  
Message**

**Effective  
Elements**

**Potential  
Improvements**

**Comparison of Concepts**

**Memorable  
Elements**

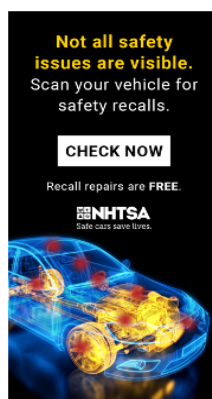
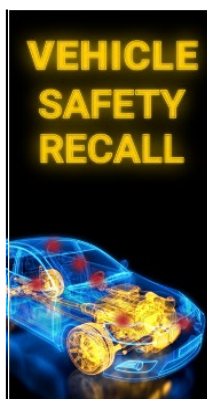
**Content  
Reactions**

**Most  
Influential**

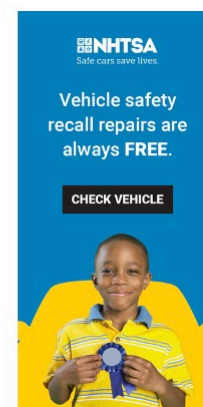
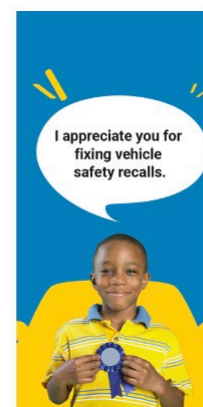
**Wrap-up and Close**

# Concepts Tested

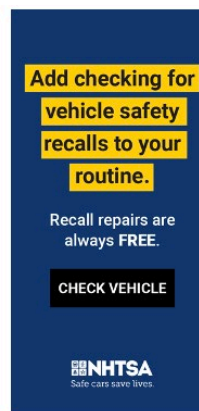
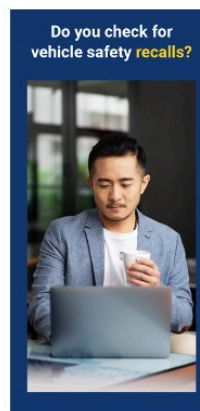
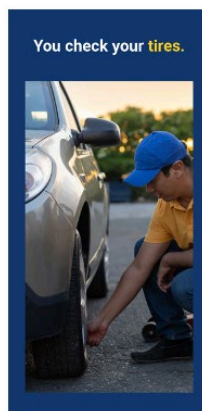
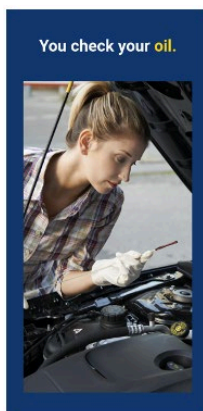
## Concept L “X-Ray”



## Concept P “Appreciate You”



## Concept M “Routine”





# RESEARCH FINDINGS



# Concept M - “Routine”

.....

You check your **oil**.



You check your **tires**.



Do you check for  
vehicle safety **recalls**?



**Add checking for  
vehicle safety  
recalls to your  
routine.**

Recall repairs are  
always **FREE**.

**CHECK VEHICLE**

 **NHTSA**  
Safe cars save lives.

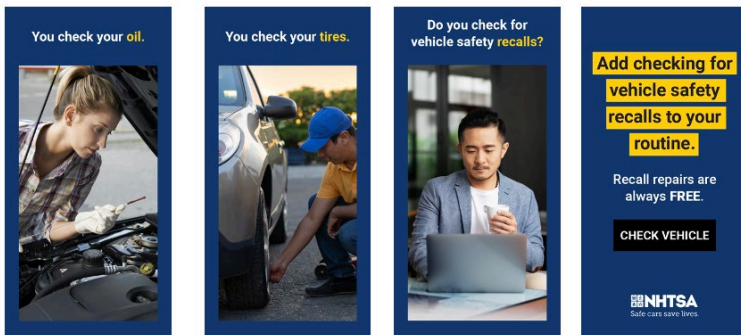


# Main Message and Effective Elements

Highest grades

**83%** (n=38) Graded **A/B**

“**Routine**” receives the highest grades overall and is most effective at influencing behavior. It comes across as a simple, yet impactful call to action with a professional design that gives the concept a high level of credibility.



“*[This ad] spoke directly toward me as somebody who maintains their vehicle... this hit home with me that I need to check for recalls... [that it] should be part of my routine maintenance for checking my vehicle.*”  
—Brian, Male, 7/13/22

## EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS

- The message is **catchy and intuitive**; checking for recalls is easy enough to add to your routine vehicle maintenance
- The **diversity in the concept is appealing** and different from typical vehicle ad archetypes
- Thoroughly communicates and **displays desired behavior**
- The color scheme and layout have a level of **professionalism and credibility** (“government blue”)
- **Does not rely on scare tactics** to get the point across; is just as effective because it makes sense

## CHALLENGE AREAS

- The last panel is busy compared to the first three; has a lot of text
- Focuses more on routine than safety (i.e., lacks urgency) which is also a positive
- The color scheme (while also positive for many participants) feels dated to some
- If one does not check their vehicle regularly (or have their vehicle checked regularly), this will not resonate

## HOW TO IMPROVE “ROUTINE”

- Making the “Safe Cars Save Lives” language more prominent in the ad will help to convey the reason for checking for recalls and communicate the importance of doing it “now” (urgency).
- Spelling out the NHTSA acronym would make the ad more credible, because while the NHTSA logo on this concept stands out to some viewers, many are not familiar with it.
- Communicating where the banner ad will take you when clicking on it by displaying NHTSA website credentials in or near the “Check Now” box will improve its overall credibility.

“I thought the images were very clear and easy to understand. They were appropriate for the message. The ad gives you a step-by-step process for making sure your car is safe, but it’s not an urgent call to action. It doesn’t put fear into me, that “if I don’t do this now, something bad is going to happen.”

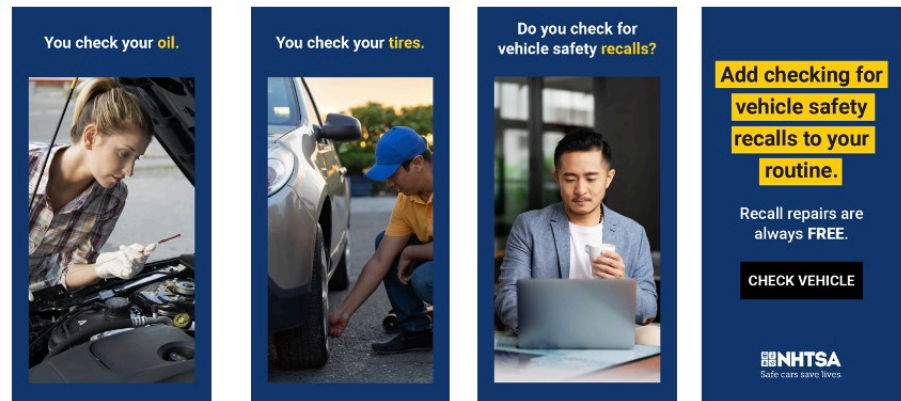
—Michael, Male, 7/14/22

“I think that the NHTSA logo should be repositioned. Maybe move it to the top and not the bottom, because you want people to see what company it is... Instead of having it at the bottom, have the logo at the top so that’s one of the first things that people can see to determine if it’s a reputable site.”

—Deanna, Female, 7/13/22

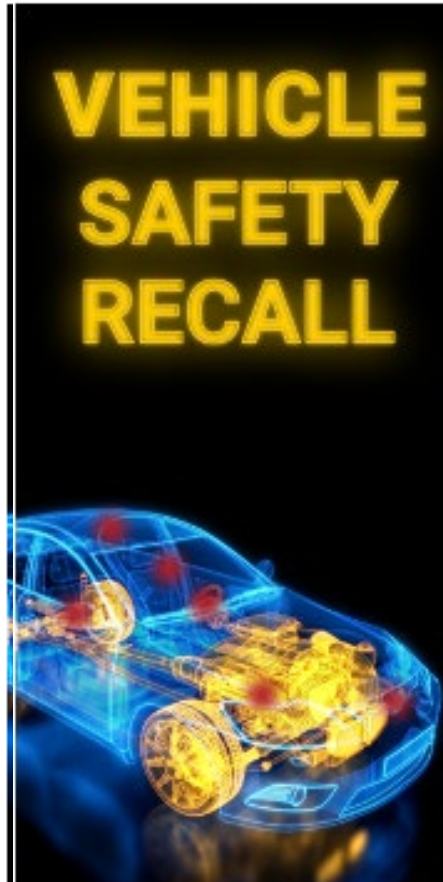
## Opportunities to Improve

“Routine” performs very well, but there is some criticism that the messaging and visual don’t convey urgency. Some viewers find the last panel to be a bit too busy and feel the call to action could get lost.



# Concept L - “X-Ray”

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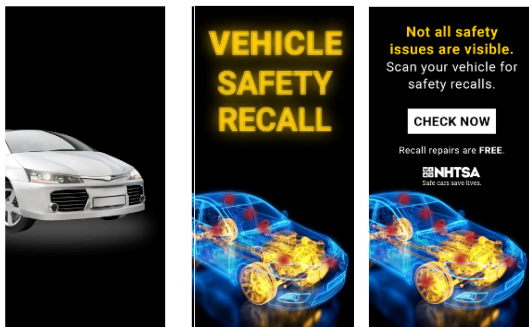




# Main Message and Effective Elements

59% (n=27) Graded A/B

“X-Ray’s” use of striking and unique visuals grabs viewers’ attention and influences them to think about potential vehicle problems that they cannot see. Confusion around some of the visuals hamper its effectiveness at influencing behavior.



“The main message I saw was *you can’t always see what the issue is, what the recall is, so I really like the fact that they did the x-ray because a lot of times we think it looks good on the outside, so it must be good on the inside.*”

—Brian, Male, 7/13/22

## EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS

- The visuals are **modern, futuristic, interesting and eye-catching**
- The glowing **yellow font communicates urgency** and grabs attention
- The **colors of the heatmap grab your attention** and communicate that there could be issues with your vehicle that you can’t see
- Clearly communicates that **recall repairs are free and important**

## CHALLENGE AREAS

- The concept’s visuals of vehicle problems remind some of extended warranty scams
- Black background might blend into some websites with a dark background or if the computer has dark mode on
- “Scan” language is misleading and confused some participants
- The visuals did not create a personal connection for most
- The first image of a regular vehicle does not grab the attention, and most would think it’s a generic vehicle ad

## HOW TO IMPROVE “X-RAY”

- Starting with the x-ray visuals would grab viewers' attention, as the first panel fails to grab viewers' attention, and many felt it is unnecessary to communicate the message.
- Revising the language from “scan your vehicle” to “check your vehicle” will clarify the call-to-action, as some indicated confusion over the verbiage.
- Consider adding visuals of real people or families will make the ad feel more personal, helping the ad to resonate with viewers.

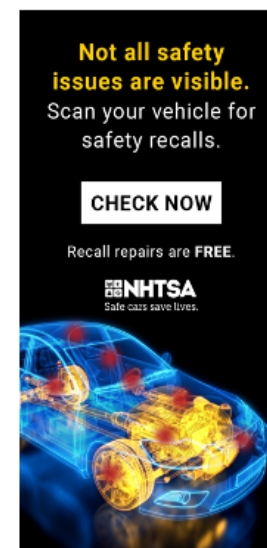
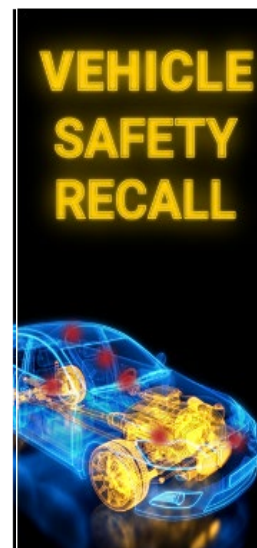
## Opportunities to Improve

“X-Ray” captures the attention of respondents and clearly communicates the message, but the visuals and language in the ad were confusing to some, detracting from its effectiveness.

“I thought the scanning part was misleading. I felt like... am I clicking this and checking if there's any recalls for my vehicle, or am I taking it in and getting it scanned? Like if your check engine light is on. So, I was confused by that.”  
—Jim, Male, 7/12/22

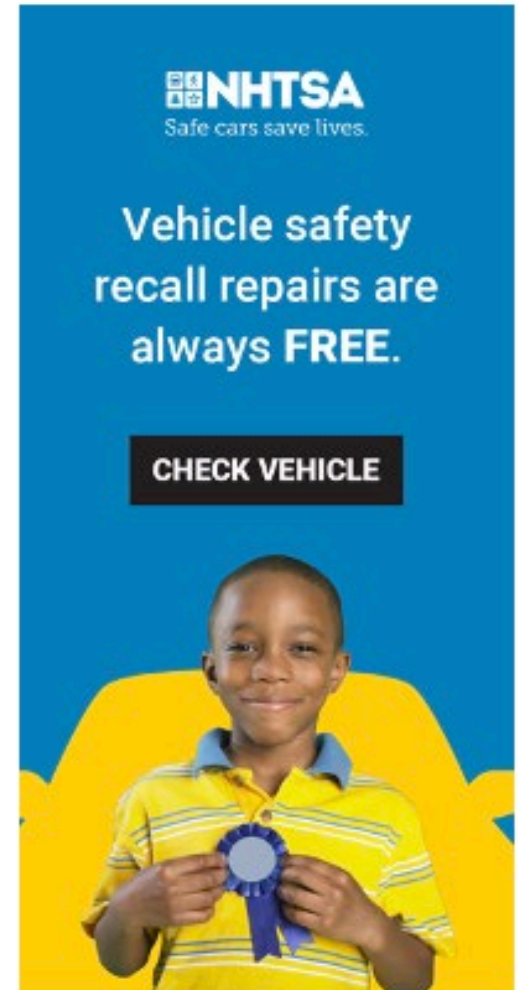
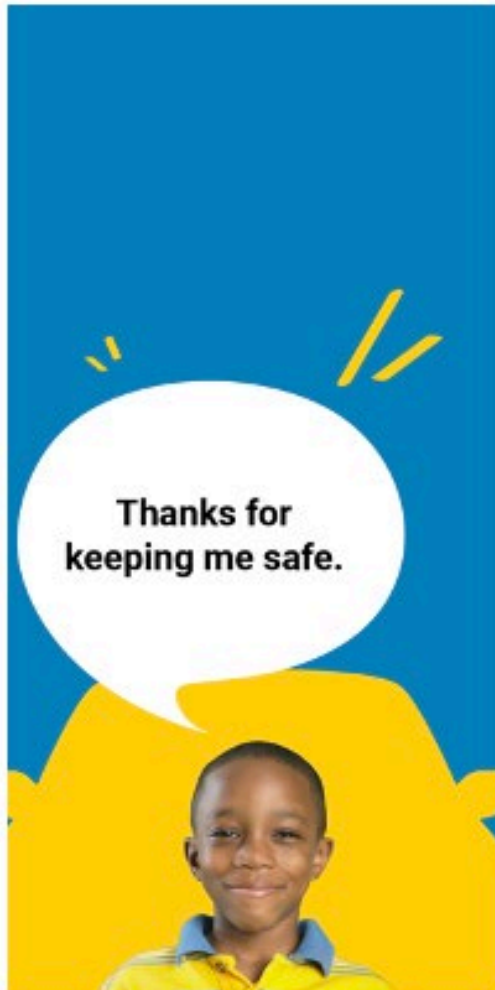
“I didn't feel like this ad was very personal... I would have liked to see an outcome of not checking your vehicle... What is the effect?”

—Gayla, Female, 7/13/22



# Concept P - “Appreciate You”

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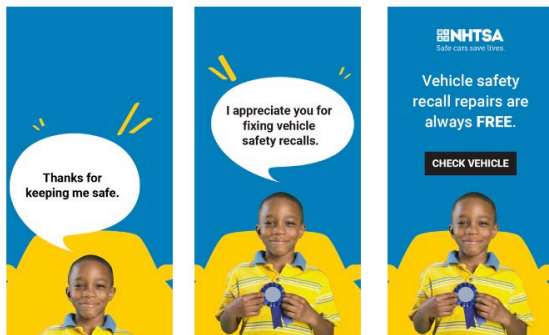


# Main Message and Effective Elements

Lowest grades

50% (n=23) Graded A/B

“**Appreciate You**” draws viewers in with its bright color scheme and appeals to sensitivities around children in its visuals. The message is clear once understood and has emotional appeal to create a moral consideration for some, recognizing that vehicle safety impacts more than just the driver.



“We all want to *keep our loved ones safe* and that boy with a face like that just grabs the moment for you and the message was clear and concise. It was simple and to the point and I enjoyed it.”

—Brent, Male, 7/13/22

## EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS

- The **bright colors catch the attention** of viewers
- The visual of the child has a **strong personal and emotional appeal**
- The idea of **protecting others and protecting children** resonates with viewers
- Communicates message of **accountability and responsibility** for checking and repairing recalls

## CHALLENGE AREAS

- The imagery of the child mainly resonates with those who have children or are living/working with children
- Visuals are generic – could be a concept for anything related to kids
- The blue ribbon confused some and distracts from the concept
- The child imagery was very happy and bright, and some had a tension with that imagery as they feel recalls are a serious issue
- Some didn't notice the vehicle outline the background as it blends in too well

# HOW TO IMPROVE “APPRECIATE YOU”

- Need to create a stronger connection between the visual and messaging of vehicle safety recalls because as it sits, the purpose of the ad is unclear from the visual alone.
- Remove the ribbon imagery - Almost none of the viewers associated the ribbon with an award for keeping the child safe, creating confusion.
- Make the visual of the vehicle more distinguished from the background to help make it clearer that the ad is related to vehicles/recalls and not something generic with children.
- Reinforcing the urgency of checking for recalls through more serious messaging will communicate the importance of checking for recalls.

*“I don’t know what the ad is for unless I read the whole thing. I know if I’m scrolling through an ad and I don’t know what it’s for at first glance, I’ll usually scroll past it... It looks like something designed like a gift to click on... like something a kid would do on a kid’s app... but it’s only for adults, so the visual and message don’t seem to match.”*

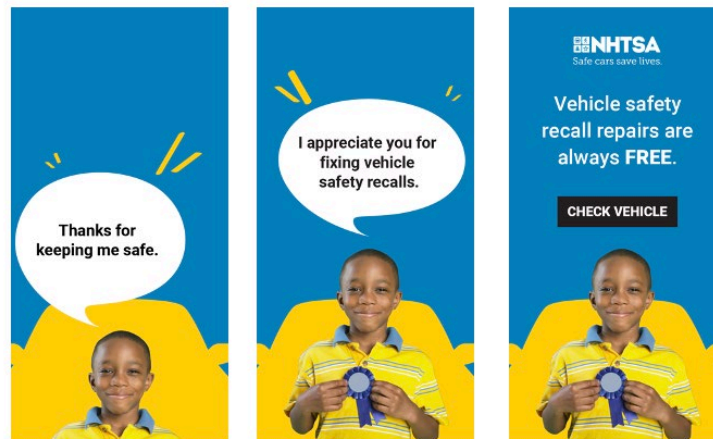
—Adam, Male, 7/13/22

*“I understand the concept of checking for recalls... and keeping people safe on the road, but I just thought the concept of the child thanking me for checking my safety recall is a bit too much... it’s not immediately eye catching and if you just saw the kid in front of the car, you would really have no idea what it was referencing. In terms of being descriptive and forthcoming with information, it’s lower on the bar than other concepts.”*

—Shae, Female, 7/13/22

## Opportunities to Improve

“Appreciate You” scores poorly across the board largely because of its presentation – the point of the ad is not clear from the visuals alone and it takes too much time to understand the message.



# CONCEPT COMPARISON





# Concept Comparison

*When comparing all three concepts, there is a clear preference for “Routine” in both effectiveness and behavior change.*



| Concept Assessment           | Graded A or B                                 | Influences Behavior     |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
|                              | Select one grade<br>#                         | Select one concept<br># |
| Concept M – “Routine”        | <b>38</b> /46<br>Graded A: 19<br>Graded B: 19 | <b>34</b> /46           |
| Concept L – “X-Ray”          | <b>27</b> /46<br>Graded A: 9<br>Graded B: 18  | <b>10</b> /46           |
| Concept P – “Appreciate You” | <b>23</b> /46<br>Graded A: 8<br>Graded B: 15  | <b>2</b> /46            |

*NOTE: Gold highlights highest score among concepts; pink highlights lowest score among concepts*

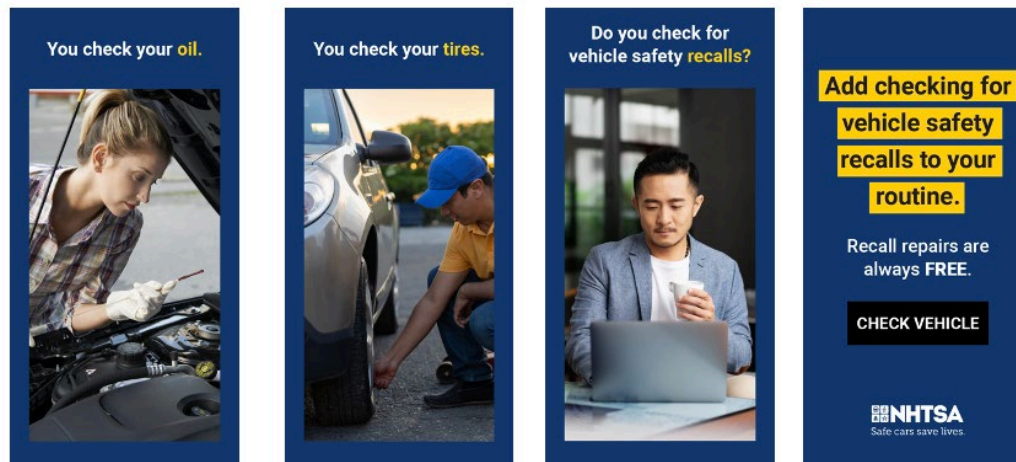
Q. How many of you graded A? B?

Q. Which is most likely to get you to visit NHTSA's website to check for info about safety recalls on your vehicle and to have any safety recalls repaired in a timely manner?

# Key Takeaways – “Routine”

**STRONGEST  
PERFORMER**

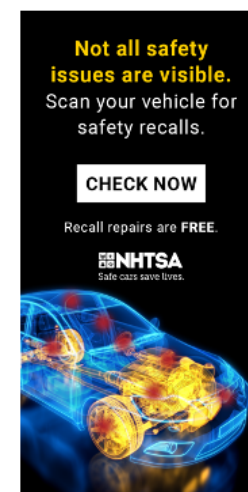
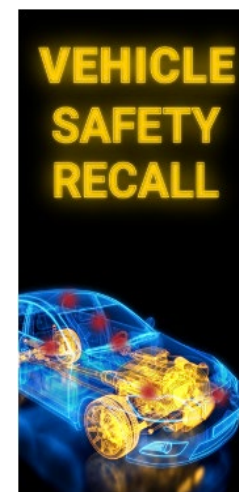
- **HIGHEST GRADED** concept that effectively communicates to viewers that they should be checking for vehicle safety recalls
- **MOST LIKELY** to influence participants' behavior
- Clearly communicates that checking for vehicle safety recalls is a simple and easy process
- Encourages viewers to be proactive in their vehicle maintenance regarding vehicle recalls rather than being reactive
- Uses a professional, credible “government” design and diverse imagery of people doing vehicle maintenance, which resonates with viewers



# Key Takeaways – “X-Ray”

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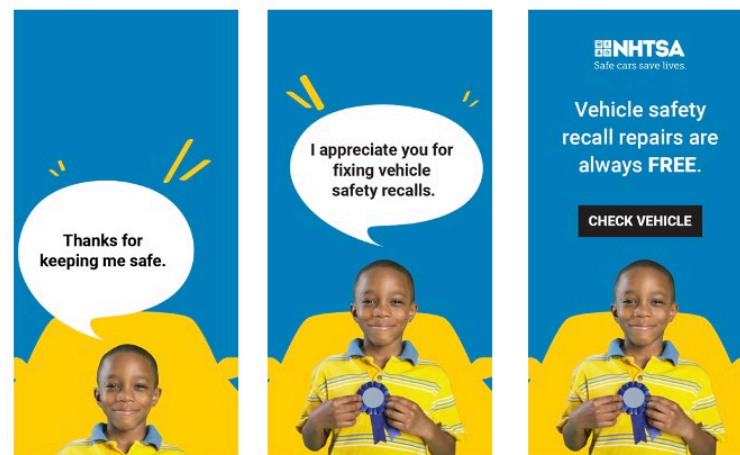
- **Effectively** communicates that checking for recalls is important as there could be issues with your vehicle that the naked eye cannot detect
- **Somewhat likely** to influence participants' behavior
- The sleek modern visuals catch viewers' attention and draw them into the ad
- The heatmap imagery juxtaposed with the first panel in the ad is a clear message that anything could be wrong with your vehicle
- The “Check Now” button creates urgency and encourages viewers to check their vehicles for recalls
- Visual of the vehicle and flashing yellow text/heatmap reminds some of extended warranty scams
- Can be enhanced by using visuals of people and making more of a personal connection



# Key Takeaways – “Appreciate You”

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- **Is NOT effective** in CLEARLY communicating the importance of checking for vehicle safety recalls
- **Least likely** to influence participants' behavior
- The imagery of the child does create an emotional appeal, but would not necessarily resonate with those without children
- The visual and color scheme is confusing for many, as it is not clear that the ad is related to vehicles without reading through the ad. Many indicated they would scroll right by the ad without reading
- The ribbon is confusing to most and its symbolism as a reward for keeping the child safe was overlooked by nearly all viewers
- Can be improved by including visuals that make a stronger connection to vehicle safety recalls and changing the mood/tone to be a bit more serious





# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION



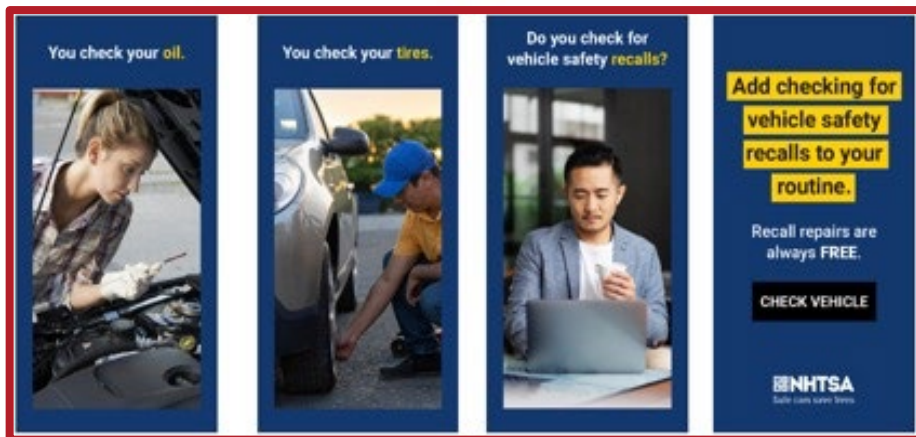
# Concept Comparison Summary

*“Routine” connects on both the personal and vehicle/recall levels, while “Appreciate You” and “X-Ray” are only able to connect on one of those levels.*



# Conclusion and Recommendation

***“Routine”** outperforms other concepts tested. We recommend moving forward with this concept and incorporating suggested improvements into the finished concept.*



## What's Working:

- Clearly communicates that viewers should add checking for recalls to their routine vehicle maintenance
- Diverse imagery is relatable - women are not routinely shown performing vehicle maintenance; many liked the diversity
- Holds clear advantage over all other concepts in influencing behavior

## Suggested Improvements:

- Many viewers indicated they would press the “button” on “Routine” if the “Check Your Vehicle Now” language is used
- Increase the emphasis of “Safe cars save lives”
- Clearly displaying NHTSA’s website on the concept will increase credibility, encouraging more people to click on the ad or look up recall information from the concept



# Conclusion and Recommendation

*To improve the likelihood to click on the ad or to search for the information on the ad, clearly showing where the ad will take you (or where you should go), will mitigate concerns about scams and malware.*

**You check your oil.**

**You check your tires.**

**Do you check for vehicle safety recalls?**

**Checking for vehicle safety recalls to your routine.**

**All repairs are always FREE.**

**CHECK VEHICLE**

**NHTSA**  
Safe cars save lives.

*"Maybe a disclaimer saying the company will not sell your personal information ... will make it more authentic... I'm just so wary. I love a button, it's so great I would love to click on it, but then you always hesitate.*

*I don't know. I might try to figure out how to go to the website where it's coming from instead of clicking on the banner ad. You know what I mean? Just see if it's like a real website and not some like phony thing that's going to give me a virus...hopefully the ad would say maybe click here or go to NHTSA.gov."*

*—Kathy, Female, 7/13/22*

*"In an advertisement like this, I would not click on these because of the risk of malware. But if it shows that this is directly from the National Highway Safety website... That definitely would encourage me, or if I saw that, I might just go and search out the website for National Highway Safety and then, you know, go directly to their website so I wouldn't risk malware."*

*—Jessica, Female, 7/13/22*

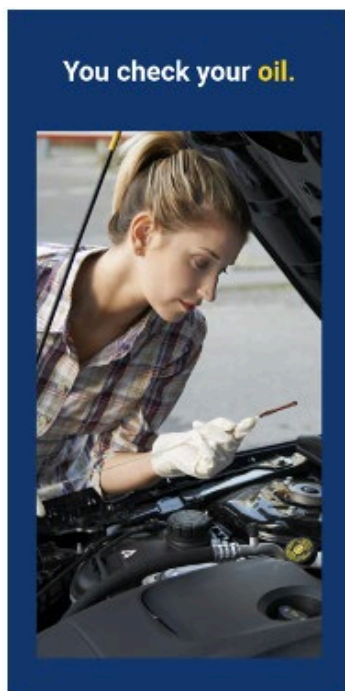
*"I think that the NHTSA logo needs to be repositioned. Maybe put it at the top and not the bottom or something, because you want people to see what company it is. Instead of having [the logo] at the bottom, have it at the top so that's one of the first things that people can see if it's a reputable site."*

*—Deanna, Female, 7/13/22*



# Conclusion and Recommendation

*Continue to use “free” because “free” is simple to understand and avoids the pitfalls of “no cost,” which makes one think about what “the cost” is and that there may be a catch of some sort.*

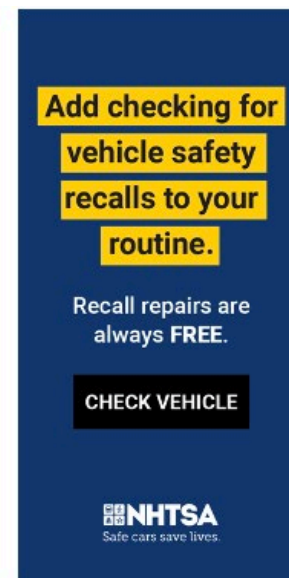
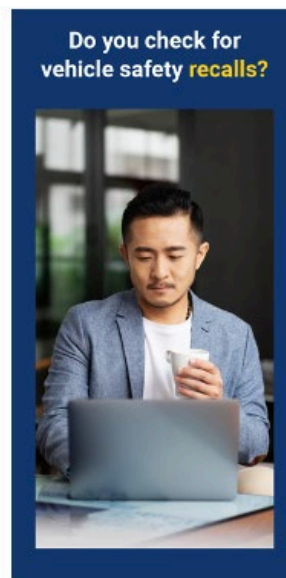
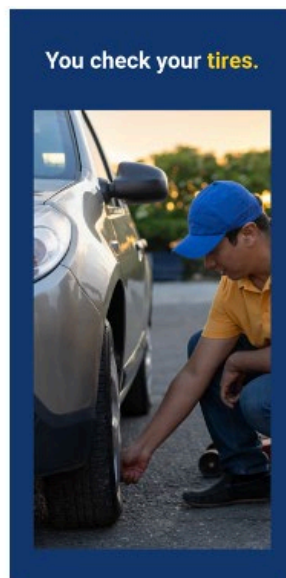
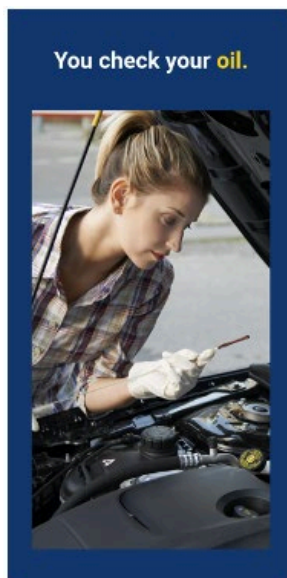


# Recommended Improvements and A/B Testing Options

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Across the board, we recommend improving the credibility and design of “Routine” by:

- Adding NHTSA.gov
- Displaying the logo on each frame
- Improve button visibility
- Using more modern design elements: full bleed photos, copy within highlighted text boxes



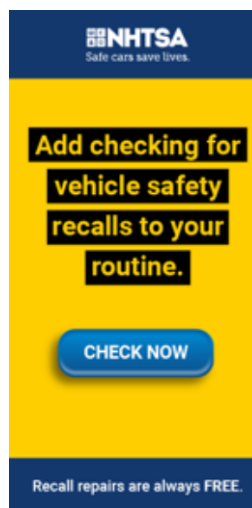
# Recommended Improvements and A/B Testing Options

*Test the improved version of “Routine” against a second version that conveys greater urgency:*

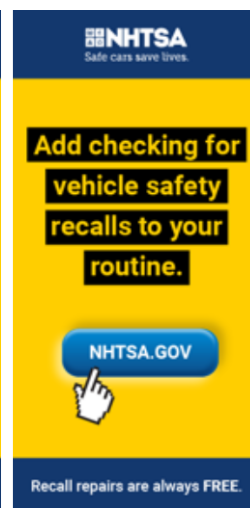
| Test Option                                     | A  | B   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>“Routine” Series A vs “Routine” Series B</b> | <b>“Routine” Series A: Regular Maintenance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommended improvements made</li></ul> | <b>“Routine” Series B: Safety Maintenance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommended improvements made</li><li>• Swap the photos and copy on <b>frames 1 and 2</b> to focus on safety maintenance:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ex. Check your brakes, check your windshield wipers, check your lights</li></ul></li><li>• “Check Now” on button</li></ul> |

# Recommended Improvements and A/B Testing Options

- If there's a desire to improve the inferred connection between the man on the computer and checking for recalls at NHTSA.gov, **we recommend making one of the following improvements to frame 4:**
  - **OPTION A:** Introduce an animated computer mouse that hovers over the button to reveal NHTSA.gov – emphasizing that checking for recalls is a quick, online process.
  - **OPTION B:** Expand the button to include NHTSA.gov, directing audiences to NHTSA.gov as part of the CTA.
  - **OPTION C:** Change the copy to include NHTSA.gov as part of the routine.

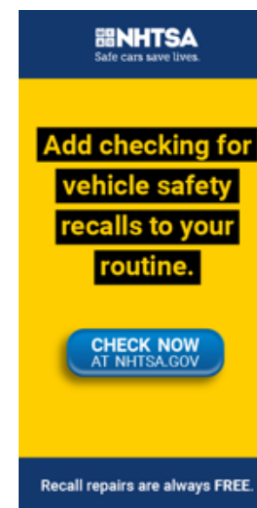


Frame 4



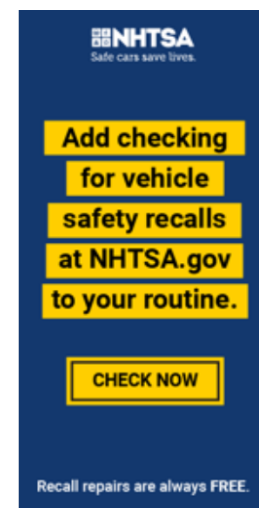
Frame 5

## OPTION A



Frame 4

## OPTION B



Frame 4

## OPTION C



# APPENDIX



# Demographics

|                  |                              | TOTAL |
|------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| Gender           | Male                         | 39%   |
|                  | Female                       | 61%   |
| Age              | 18-24                        | 13%   |
|                  | 25-34                        | 24%   |
|                  | 35-44                        | 30%   |
|                  | 45-54                        | 17%   |
|                  | 55+                          | 15%   |
| Ethnicity        | White                        | 46%   |
|                  | Black                        | 22%   |
|                  | Hispanic                     | 20%   |
|                  | Asian                        | 7%    |
|                  | Other/Mixed Race             | 7%    |
| Education        | HS or less                   | 9%    |
|                  | Some college/vocational/tech | 25%   |
|                  | College graduate             | 41%   |
|                  | Postgraduate                 | 24%   |
| Household Income | Less than \$50K              | 13%   |
|                  | \$50K - \$99K                | 48%   |
|                  | \$100K+                      | 39%   |

|                       |                          | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| 9 Point Census Region | New England              | 17%   |
|                       | Middle Atlantic          | 11%   |
|                       | South Atlantic           | 17%   |
|                       | East South Central       | -     |
|                       | West South Central       | 11%   |
|                       | East North Central       | 7%    |
|                       | West North Central       | 9%    |
|                       | Mountain                 | 15%   |
|                       | Pacific                  | 13%   |
| Children <18          | Yes, children < 18 in HH | 52%   |
| In household          | No children < 18 in HH   | 48%   |